# Central Parsonsfield Focus Area

Parsonsfield, Maine

***Description:***

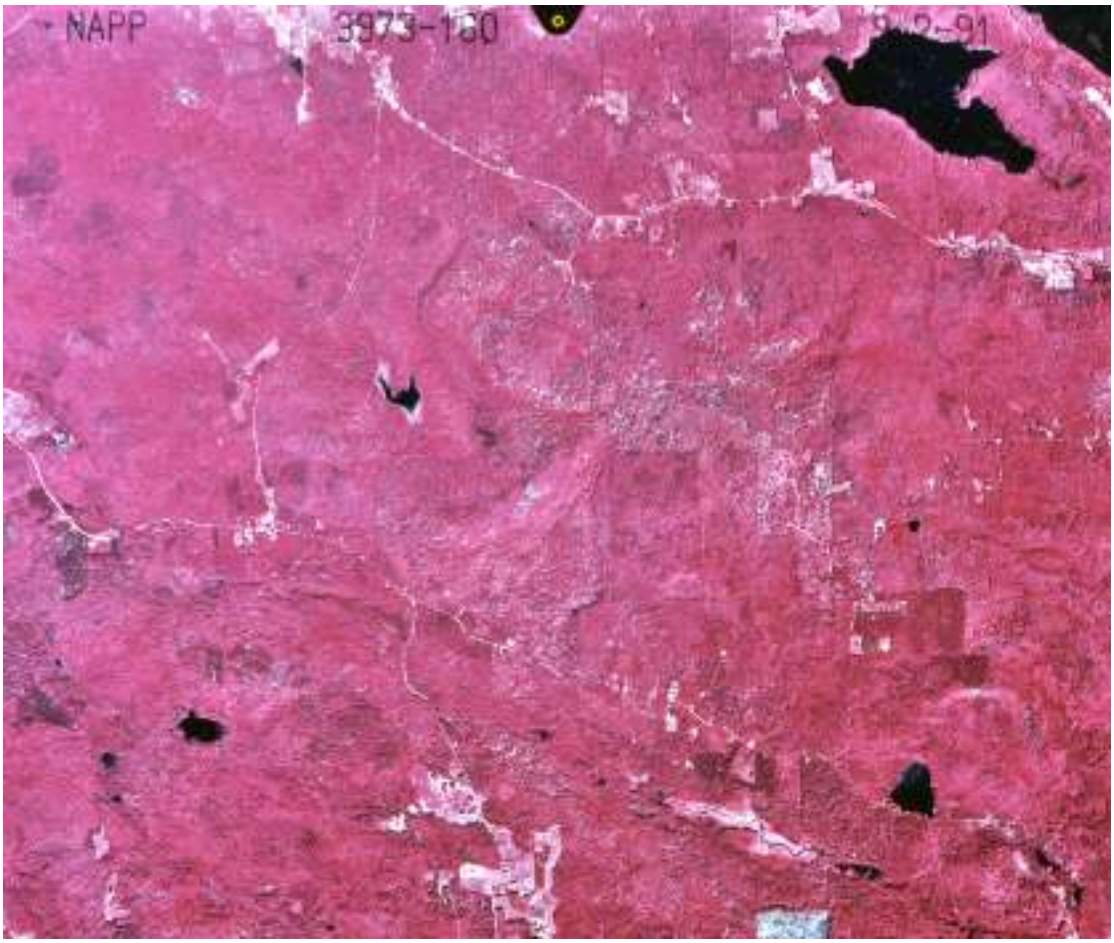
The Central Parsonsfield Focus Area includes a series of low mountains and rolling forested hills. The geology and land forms of this site create conditions that support numerous rare plants as well as several good quality examples of the Ironwood – oak – ash woodland natural community type. Ironwood – oak – ash woodland natural communities, along with habitat for many of the rare plants, occur on the upper portions of steep, south facing slopes on several of the mountains. Sections of these steep slopes have calcium enriched rock outcrops near their summits and talus scattered on the slopes below. Ironwood – oak – ash woodlands typically have open canopies that allow an abundance of light to reach the understory and ground layer. Ironwood and red oak are the most common trees with white ash, basswood, sugar maple, white pine, and red cedar all as infrequent associates. Poor growing conditions due to droughty

**Ironwood – oak – ash woodland in Parsonsfield**

soils or possibly past fires have helped to keep the trees in this habitat type spread out and stunted. The herb layer features plant species typical of moderately enriched sites, such as herb Robert, hepatica, and wild licorice. Vegetation may be patchy, developing in pockets among the rocks, or more continuous along upper slopes and ridges. In general, these sites have not been

harvested for timber, most likely due of the poor quality of the trees and/or the steepness of slopes where they occur.

Other natural communities that have been documented within the focus area include Hemlock Forest, Enriched Northern Hardwood Forest, and Tall Sedge Fen. Descriptions of each are listed below:




**Color infrared aerial photo of Central Parsonsfield focus area (1991)**

**Hemlock Forest:** These forests are dark, closed canopy forests with hemlock as the dominant tree species. Type varies from strongly coniferous (hemlock with spruce or pine) to mixed (hemlock - northern hardwoods). Shrub, herb and bryoid layers are very sparse due to heavy shade. The ground layer is mostly conifer litter, with spotty bryophyte cover. Hemlock forest often occur on slopes and in ravines (cool microsites), with well- to imperfectly-drained acidic soils.

**Enriched Northern Hardwood Forest:** This type is a closed-canopy forest with sugar maple as the dominant tree species, and with basswood and white ash in lesser amounts. The shrub layer is dominated largely by tree regeneration. The lush herb layer may contain certain indicator species such as maidenhair fern, blue cohosh, and silvery spleenwort fern. This type is

typically found on sheltered (concave) hillsides or slope bases where nutrients accumulate, often over calcium-bearing bedrock.

**Tall Sedge Fen:** This is a non-forested wetland community type and is made up of expanses of tall grasses and sedges growing on peat soils. Slender sedge typically dominant, and beaked sedge and lake-bank sedge are also characteristic; bluejoint grass is often present in small amounts. The herb layer is continuous, and most shrubs are less than one meter tall except for an occasional alder or meadowsweet. Dwarf shrubs are always less abundant than the herbaceous plants. The moss layer is in inverse proportion to the amount of standing water. This community is generally found on peaty deposits adjacent to open water; sometimes a floating mat.

Many rare plants species including Missouri rock cress, ebony spleenwort, Douglas' knotweed, blunt-lobed woodsia, early crowfoot, and fern-leaved false foxglove are found growing on the upper slopes of these hills. Down slope, where the canopy is closed and the trees are taller, sugar maple, basswood, and ash are common at several sites, and other rare plants such as bottlebrush grass, hairy wood brome-grass, and white wood aster also occur. Most of these species are at the northern edge of their ranges in southern ME.

One of the eastern United States rarest orchids, small whorled pogonia, is also found at several locations in the focus area. Small whorled pogonia typically occurs in mid-successional mixed woods with sparse shrub and herb layers and thick leaf litter. It often occurs near intermittent streamlets or where a hardpan impedes water percolation into the soil. Associated understory plants include Indian cucumber-root, New York fern, partridge berry, and rattlesnake plantain.

***Rare Species Table for Central Parsonsfield***:

| Common Name | Latin Name | Status | S-Rank | G-Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Natural Communities** | | | | |
| Hemlock Forest | Hemlock Forest | n/a | S4 | no rank |
| Oak-Ash Woodland | Ironwood – Oak - Ash Woodland | n/a | S2S3 | no rank |
| Enriched Northern Hardwood Forest | Maple – Basswood – Ash Forest | n/a | S3 | no rank |
| Tall Sedge Fen | Mixed Tall Sedge Fen | n/a | S4 | no rank |
| **Rare Plants** | | | | |
| Missouri Rockcress | *Arabis missouriensis* | T | S1 | G4G5Q |
| Ebony Spleenwort | *Asplenium platyneuron* | SC | S2 | G5 |
| White Wood Aster | *Aster divaricatus* | SC | S2 | G5 |
| Fern-leaved False Foxglove | *Aureolaria pedicularia* | SC | S2 | G5 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hairy Wood Brome-grass | *Bromus pubescens* | PE | S1 | G5 |
| Dry Land Sedge | *Carex siccata* | T | S1 | G5T? |
| Bosc's Goosefoot | *Chenopodium berlandieri* | SC | S1 | G5T3T5 |
| Spotted Wintergreen | *Chimaphila maculata* | E | S1 | G5 |
| Bottlebrush Grass | *Elymus hystrix* | SC | S2 | G5 |
| Small Whorled Pagonia | *Isotria medeoloides* | E | S2 | G2 |
| American Ginseng | *Panax quinquefolius* | E | S3 | G3G4 |
| Douglas' Knotweed | *Polygonum douglasii* | T | S1 | G5 |
| Early Crowfoot | *Ranunculus fascicularis* | T | S1 | G5 |
| Swamp Saxifrage | *Saxifraga pensylvanica* | SC | S2 | G5 |
| Creeping Spike-moss | *Selaginella apoda* | E | S1 | G5 |
| Nodding Pagonia | *Triphora trianthophora* | T | S1 | G3G4 |
| Blunt-lobed Woodsia | *Woodsia obtusa* | T | S1 | G5 |

***Other Resources Mapped by MDIFW:***
Deer Wintering Area
Wading Bird / Waterfowl Habitat

***Conservation Considerations :***

- Preserving the natural communities and other sensitive features within the focus area will be best achieved by working to conserve the integrity of the larger natural systems in which these features occur. Conserving the larger systems will help ensure that both common and rare natural features will persist on the landscape in this part of the state.
- Conservation planning for upland features should include setting some areas aside from timber harvests to allow for the development of some unmanaged forests.
- Ironwood – Oak – Ash Woodland natural communities and rare plant populations found here will be best maintained by leaving them undisturbed.
- Timber harvesting that excludes buffered sensitive areas should be compatible with the long term persistence of these features.
- Close adherence to Best Management Practices for forestry activities near vernal pools (see Forestry Endangered and Threatened Species Guide) will ensure the protection of wetland habitats and the amphibian food source they supply.
- Intact forest buffers of 250 feet or more should be maintained around known concentrations of rare plants.
- No ATV access should be permitted on the summits and upper slopes of the mountains.

***Protection Status:***
An easement is being developed for the largest land holder in the focus area to limit development and to safeguard against impacting sensitive features. Otherwise, there is no known conservation ownership within the focus area.

## STATE RARITY RANKS

**S1** Critically imperiled in Maine because of extreme rarity (five or fewer occurrences or very few remaining individuals or acres) or because some aspect of its biology makes it especially vulnerable to extirpation from the State of Maine.

**S2** Imperiled in Maine because of rarity (6-20 occurrences or few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline.

**S3** Rare in Maine (on the order of 20-100 occurrences).

**S4** Apparently secure in Maine.

**S5** Demonstrably secure in Maine.

**Note**: **State Ranks** are determined by the Maine Natural Areas Program.

## GLOBAL RARITY RANKS

**G1** Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (five or fewer occurrences or very few remaining individuals or acres) or because some aspect of its biology makes it especially vulnerable to extirpation from the State of Maine.

**G2** Globally imperiled because of rarity (6-20 occurrences or few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline.

**G3** Globally rare (on the order of 20-100 occurrences).

**G4** Apparently secure globally.

**G5** Demonstrably secure globally.

**Note:** **Global Ranks** are determined by The Nature Conservancy.

## STATE LEGAL STATUS FOR PLANTS

**Note**: State legal status is according to 5 M.R.S.A. § 13076-13079, which mandates the Department of Conservation to produce and biennially update the official list of Maine's endangered and threatened plants. The list is derived by a technical advisory committee of botanists who use data in the Natural Areas Program's database to recommend status changes to the Department of Conservation.

**E** ENDANGERED; Rare and in danger of being lost from the state in the foreseeable future, or federally listed as Endangered.

**T** THREATENED; Rare and, with further decline, could become endangered; or federally listed as Threatened.

**SC** SPECIAL CONCERN; Rare in Maine, based on available information, but not sufficiently rare to be considered Threatened or Endangered.

Visit our web site for more information on rare, threatened and endangered species!
http://www.state.me.us/doc/nrimc/mnap/factsheets/mnapfact.htm